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Tempo and rubato in Alexander Scriabin's early piano preludes

The score is the main source on which a performer's interpretation is based. Despite its level of detail, the score provides only a very incomplete representation of the music itself. The development of an interpretation of a piece of music is in essence a creative artistic process, whereby artists make different personal artistic decisions.

This research examines the parameters tempo and rubato (tempo variation) in the performance of Scriabin's piano preludes on the basis of recordings from 1910 until 2010. A study of the recordings allows an objective comparative research of the pianist's artistic decisions and provides insight in the performance history of these preludes.

Hence, the development of an efficient and consistent method to compare the performers' decisions concerning tempo and rubato on a large scale is a major research objective. The recording analysis, using a combination of different aural analysis methods, software tools and statistical data analyses, results in a mapping of the differences and similarities in the pianist's interpretations. A reconstruction of a century of performance history opens up opportunities for a more grounded, more profound and deliberate personal interpretation of the preludes for pianists of today.

Based on the (preliminary) results of the analysed recordings the researcher formulated hypotheses concerning tendencies and singularities in the performance history of the preludes, resulting in a setup for a personal artistic experiment. Certain expression forms in playing, such as specific types of rubato playing and types of 'micro timing', seem to have been gradually falling in disuse over time. Through this experiment the researcher aims to relearn, assimilate and incorporate them as part of his personal playing style, leading to an enriched spectrum of expression tools.

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